

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9373
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0699

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, LA, FR
SUBJECT: LAOS EXPELS TWO FRENCH DIPLOMATS

SUMMARY: THE LAO EXPULSION OF TWO FRENCH DIPLOMATS IS PROBABLY
THE RESULT OF SINCERELY HELD SUSPICION THAT THEY WERE ENGAGED
IN ESPIONAGE AND CONTACT WITH EMIGRES. THE CASE, HOWEVER,
IS CONFUSED AND WEAK. THE UNDERLYING EXPLANATION IS THAT
THE LPDR STILL FEARS WESTERN INFLUENCE. IN THEIR PARANOIA
BORN OF PETULANCE AND FRUSTRATION, THE LAO THINK THAT STRIKING OUT AT
THE FRENCH WILL SOMEHOW REDUCE THEIR MANY PROBLEMS.
END SUMMARY.

1. THE REACTION HERE IN VIENTIANE TO THE JUNE 23 EXPULSION
OF TWO SENIOR FRENCH DIPLOMATS IS STILL ONE OF WONDERING
WHAT LIES BEHIND IT ALL. IT IS OBVIOUSLY A MOVE TO REDUCE
THE SIZE AND INFLUENCE OF THE FRENCH MISSION, THE
LARGEST WESTERN EMBASSY IN VIENTIANE. THE CONFUSION
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COMES, HOWEVER, IN TRYING TO EXPLAIN WHY THE LAO CHOSE
THIS PARTICULAR TIMING AND WHY THEY CHOSE SUCH
UNNECESSARILY HARSH, ABRUPT METHODS. WHEN WE WERE TOLD
TO REDUCE OUR MISSION IN JANUARY 1977, WE WERE GIVEN
SEVERAL WEEKS TO ARRANGE TRANSFERS. THIS TIME, THE TWO
EXPULLED FRENCH DIPLOMATS WERE GIVEN 24 HOURS TO LEAVE.

2. REASONS CAN BE FOUND FOR CHOOSING THESE INDIVIDUALS AS OBJECTS OF LAO WRATH. THE SENIOR OF THW TWO, DCM CHRISTIAN LAMBERT, WAS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS OUTSPOKEN ANTI-COMMUNIST, ANTI-VIETNAMESE, AND ANTI-PLDR SYMPATHIES. HE WAS ALSO IN THE HABIT OF MAKING FREQUENT COURIER RUNS TO BANGKOK, AN ACTIVITY WHICH HAS ALWAYS RAISED LAO SUSPICIONS OF SPYING, MESSAGE-CARRYING, AND CONTACT WITH REFUGEES. LUCIEN GUSTIN, THE CULTURAL COUNSELLOR, IS MUCH MORE DISCREET THAN LAMBERT, BUT HE WAS IN CHARGE OF THE POPULAR FRENCH CULTURAL CENTER AND ITS WELL ATTENDED FRENCH LANGUAGE CLASSES. THE LPDR WAS WELL AWARE THAT MANY OF THOSE LAO WHO FREQUENTED TH CENTER LATER TURNED UP AS REFUGEES IN FRANCE.

3. GIVEN THE LPDR'S CHRONIC PARANOIA, SUCH CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE WOULD BE MORE THAN ENOUGH TO MAKE CHARGES OF ANTI-LAO ACTIVITY AND ESPIONAGE AGAINST LAMBERT AND GUSTIN. NEVERTHELESS, THE CASE IS FLIMSY. LAMBERT MADE COURIER RUNS TO BANGKOK BECAUSE SOMEBODY HAD TO DO IT, HE DID NOT HAVE MUCH TO DO HERE IN VIENTIANE, HE DID NOT GET ALONG PARTICULARLY WELL WITH US AMBASSADOR, AND AS A RESULT OF PREVIOUS POSTINGS IN BANGKOK, HE HAD MANY FRIENDS THERE. IT IS TRUE THAT THE CULTURAL CENTER HAS GRADUATED MANY REFUGEES, BUT THIS HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR SEVERAL YEARS AND WOULD PRESUMABLY BECOME LESS GALLING WHEN THE

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CENTER CLOSES COMPLETELY THIS FRIDAY (JUNE 30). (ALTHOUGH THE LAO ORDERED THE CENTER CLOSED SOME MONTHS AGO, IT WAS STILL OPERATING ON A REDUCED SCALE OFFERING LANGUAGE LESSONS TO THE FOREIGN COMMUNITY.) GUSTING WAS DUE TO LEAVE ANYWAY ON JUNE 30 WITH ALL THE FRENCH TEACHERS.

4. THERE IS EVIDENCE OF CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION ON THE PART OF THE LAO WITH RESPECT TO THE EXPULSIONS. LAMBERT IS CURRENTLY IN FRANCE ON LEAVE AND STRICTLY SPEAKING CANNOT BE EXPELLED. HE CAN ONLY BE ORDERED NOT TO RETURN. AS FOR GUSTING, ONLY A FEW DAYS AGO HE WAS ASKED BY THE LAO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION TO MAKE THE RESPONSE TO A LAO SPEECH OF THANKS AND FAREWELL AT A JUNE 24 RECEPTION IN HONOR OF THE DEPARTING TEACHERS. SINCE HE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE OUT OF THE COUNTRY BY THE TIME OF THE PARTY, HE, LIKE ALL BUT ONE OR TWO OF THE FRENCH TEACHERS, DID NOT ATTEND. (DUE TO ILLNESS, GUSTING WILL NOT ACTUALLY LEAVE LAO UNTIL TODAY, JUNE 26.)

5. COMMENT: ASIDE FROM THE STRAIGHTFORWARD EXPLANATION THAT THE LAO REALLY DID THINK THEY HAD A SOLID ESPIONAGE AND PRO-EMIGRE AGAINST LAMBERT AND GUSTIN, THERE

ARE A SERIES OF MORE DEVIOUS EXPLANATORY THEORIES. ONE
IS THAT THE LPDR'S SOVIET AND VIETNAMESE PATRONS MIGHT
HAVE THOUGHT IT ADVANTAGEOUS TO HAVE THE LAO MAKE AN
ANTI-WESTERN GESTURE AND REDUCE ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING
CENTERS OF WESTERN INFLUENCE IN LAOS. A POSSIBLE LAO
MOTIVE COULD HAVE BEEN A WISH TO DIVERT ATTENTION FROM
THE BIND IN WHICH THE LAO CURRENTLY FIND THEMSELVES
WITH RESPECT TO THE SINO-VIETNAMESE DISPUTE. ANOTHER
LAO MOTIVE COULD BE AN UNARTICULATED FEELING ON THE PART OF THE LPDR
THAT THE PICTURE THEY PRESENT TO THE WORLD OF WEAKNESS
AND INCOMPETENCE COULD SOMEHOW BE CORRECTED IF THEY
GAVE THE FRENCH A SHARP KICK IN THE SHINS.
SUCH A MOVE MIGHT MOMENTARILY IMPROVE MORALE
WITH THE LPDR, BUT TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD IT IS ONLY
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EVIDENCE OF A PETULANCE AND FRUSTRATION WHICH IN THE
LONG RUN ONLY MAKES THINGS WORSE FOR THE LAO.
ROBERTS

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